

Ocean Traveler Glass Buoy Donated to Lower Township

LOWER TOWNSHIP- It was a curious sight when a small sphere with a boat attached, both made of glass, washed up on the beach at Cape May State Park, July 16.

Jane Roop, a visitor's service specialist at the state park, found the object on the beach at the waterline. Initially, she took it home and put it in her swimming pool.

On Aug. 12, Lower Township Mayor Michael Beck thanked Roop for donating the buoy/boat to the township.

"This so pretty that I need to put this where it has meaning," said Roop. "This came in on a Lower Township beach."

It will be placed on display in Township Hall.

Roop found a website address on the bottom of the boat and contacted the creator of the object, Michael Hengler, a resident of Hawaii, who had just completed a three-month fellowship at Wheaton Arts in Millville.

A total of 33 glass buoy-boats were launched July 15 from Hereford Inlet with the assistance of the Wildwood Beach Patrol. Hengler said his hope was the buoy-boats would be pulled into the Gulf Stream and eventually into the North Atlantic Drift.

Hengler said currents could take the buoy-boats past Spain and North Africa and send them back to the Caribbean.

As the buoy-boats wash up, Hengler will create a tracking map to have a sense of connecting the world through this project, he said.

Two of the 33 have been found, one in Lower Township and one on Cape May's beach. The others are either still out at sea or have washed up in rural areas and have not yet been found, said Hengler.

Each boat was tested prior to release to make sure the buoyancy of the buoy was sufficient.

"It's the idea that these boats are going off in life on a chance voyage, sort of having an undetermined destination and leaving it to forces beyond you, the ocean currents and the winds to just kind of guide you into some other foreign shore," said Hengler.

He holds a master's degree from the University of Hawaii in glass and sculpture.

Hengler has been working in glass for 13 years and will be teaching artistic glass at the University of Hawaii.

Some inspiration for the project stems from Hengler completing his undergraduate degree at the University of Oregon. He took oceanography classes which included studies of how containers are lost after falling off ships and where the cargo was eventually located.

Roop said she was pleased Hengler was interested in clean oceans and upcoming Native American Events at Cape May Point State Park. He promised to return to the state park for World Ocean's Day in August 2014.

Three Native American Events will be held at the state park this month. On Aug. 14 at 10 a.m., Chief Bluejay will lead a program entitled "First Recycler of Mother Earth."

On Aug. 16 at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., Chief Shelley will hold a program to show children Lenape culture.

